

Shipbuilding

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Out Of The Past

By GERSHOM BRADFORD

THE WADSWORTH SCARPH

Duxbury had several connections with the bark Amy Turner. She was built in East Boston in 1877 by Smith and Townsend, Smith being a Duxbury man. Her captain was Albert Newell, who married Emily Brewster Loring of Island Creek. Several Duxbury seamen sailed in her first and last and Ernest Wadsworth, of pleasant memory, was her carpenter.

Aboard a sailing ship the carpenter was an important member of the crew. His duties called for a wide range of skills. He, and the sailmaker, were called "idlers," a gross misnomer; they worked all day, but had "all night in." They reported to the mate at the call of "all hands," perhaps to help reef or furl a hard beset topsail in a gale of wind.

It was a delight, in more recent years, to visit Ernest's boat-shop down on the Village shore. There salty conversation and skillful work prevailed. It was there in his latter days that he built his 33-foot schooner and the four-foot model of the Amy Turney, both high in craftsmanship. It was there that he explained how he scarphed the spanker gaff.

STORY SEAS

The Amy Turner was off Cape Horn beating westward against the heavy gales. Somehow the spanker gaff was carried away -- broken short off about one-third out from the mast. Captain was dismayed. The spanker was a vital sail under such circumstances. Wadsworth was called into consultation. He tried to assure the captain that he could scarph the spar.

"Yes, but you will shorten it and that will require the sail to be recut with loss of time and efficiency of the sail."

"No, captain, I can scarph it without the loss of an inch."

"If you can do that, I will buy you a hat," promised the captain, recovering his usual confidence.

Wadsworth carefully meshed the two splintered ends restoring the spar to its normal form - not easy on a rolling deck. He then scribed a LENGTHWISE line, across the break, exactly in the middle of the gaff. This done, the two parts were separated and with a splitting saw he followed the scribed line of the peak, or longer piece, for a distance of eight feet, at which point he cut half-way across and removed an eight-foot piece, half-round. He then used the same method to get a four-foot piece of the inner end. Next comes the trick. These two pieces, the eight-foot and four-foot, were then meshed exactly as they were originally. The two splintered ends of the main gaff were likewise meshed. When the parts were all assembled Wadsworth placed the eight-foot piece ACROSS the break, bringing the whole spar back its original shape; but the fracture supported by one-half of solid spar. There was no loss of length.

The parts were then bolted together, splints, called fishes, applied and the whole area covered with close turns of rope, each hard against the last. This is called woolding. The repaired gaff carried the sail past Cape Horn and on to Honolulu. Captain Newell went ashore to enter his ship at the customhouse. Returning, he brought a package - a hat for Wadsworth.